

Congressman Harry Teague Fights for Veterans in Budget Testimony

Washington, DC-Wednesday, Congressman Harry Teague testified to the Budget Committee on the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2010 budget. As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Congressman Harry Teague made the budget's impacts on our nation's Veterans the central focus of his testimony. Congressman Harry Teague applauded the President for significantly increasing funding for the Veterans Administration and for making the mental health needs of veterans a priority in the budget. Congressman Harry Teague expressed concern that the President did not propose advance funding for the Veterans Administration, a change that would allow caregivers to plan ahead and better serve our veterans.

Below is an excerpt of Congressman Teague's testimony:

"Thank you, Chairman Spratt and Ranking Member Ryan, for inviting me here to testify before your Committee today. I appreciate the opportunity to share my concerns about the impact the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2010 Budget will have on our nation's veterans, and to express my strong views that we in Congress must do everything that we can to ensure that we are sufficiently funding the Veterans Administration.

I would first like to applaud the Administration for proposing a budget that, for the first time, exceeds the amount requested by the Independent Budget of Veteran Service Organizations by at least \$1 billion. That shows a serious and long overdue commitment to those who have sacrificed so much for our nation.

Like many of you, I think it's about time that we start doing as much for our veterans as they have done for us. And this Budget will help us do that -- it will help us eliminate the shameful backlog of 400,000 veterans benefits claims and finally get those veterans the services and support they deserve. As we are all well aware, with so many new veterans entering the VA system, issues are arising and it is clear that the VA system is not yet ready to properly address all of these needs.

That is why I am particularly pleased that the President's proposed budget prioritizes the mental

health needs of our veterans, with a great emphasis on care for those suffering from PTSD, traumatic brain injury and substance abuse. We know the number of PTSD and TBI cases are on the rise and the effects can be catastrophic. That's why we should be screening all returning service members for PTSD and traumatic brain injuries and then doing all that we can to support those who need help. This Budget allows us to do that and it also enhances the VA's suicide prevention campaign, an increasingly important program.

While the budget does do many great things for our veterans, it is disappointing that President Obama has opted not to include advance appropriations for the VA. Funding the VA with advanced appropriations rather than every year doesn't cost any additional money. It just allows hospitals and clinics in the VA system to plan ahead. Right now, VA caregivers don't know what their budget is for the next year, and when funding bills are approved late, as they usually are, care gets rationed.

When VA budgets are delayed, veterans pay the price. While President Obama has shown that he has many of the right priorities in this VA budget, the VA funding system itself is downright broken. Advance appropriations is a common-sense solution to that problem. It should be in the budget..."

President Obama submitted a proposed budget to the Budget Committee last week for consideration. During consideration of the budget Members of the House of Representatives can bring their concerns to the Budget Committee. The Budget Committee is reviewing the President's proposed budget and is expected to submit a budget in the coming weeks.

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